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A Reading of *Away from Her*, Sarah Polley's adaptation of Alice Munro's short story, "The Bear Came Over the Mountain"

Agnès Berthin-Scaillet

1 By nature, the visual field inspires semantic configurations, but is also inspired by them. How does a filmic adaptation cross the spectrum of the arts? To quote Seymour Chatman, it does so by means of "spoken words combined with the movements of actors that imitate characters against sets which imitate places" (Chatman 403). In the case of *Away from Her*, the medium is particularly well-*adapted*, since the film is to be read as a reflection on and of memory. The process of filmic intellection in itself implies the perception of fragments built up into a continuum, and according to Metz's concept of the "*grande syntagmatique,*" defined as a chain, it sollicits the viewer's memory to produce meaning. Daniel Dayan makes it quite clear: "the meaning of a shot is given retrospectively. It does not meet the shot on the screen but only in the memory of the spectator. A retroactive process organises the signified" (Dayan 450). The role played by memory in the spectator-image relation is also highlighted by J. L. Schefer in his essay *l'Homme Ordinaire du Cinéma*: to him, the mental process of re-membering in the literal sense of the term is inherent in the very experience of viewing a film. "Beyond the duration of the experience of film viewing, images do have a power of remanence, of recurrence, which defines the transformation of an image into its mnesic double" (Schefer 120).

The text as a pre-text

2 In the cinema, evocation means invocation and memories materialize, become images. Interestingly, the first three shots of the film are memories: Grant driving to Marian's place for the first time, a close-up of Fiona's young face on the day when she proposed

to him, and a shot of the couple skiing outside their cottage. The three shots belong to three distinct layers of time, to the past of the diegesis, away from the "tense" of the mainstream narrative, that is Fiona's first steps into the inevitable "pattern of deterioration" which gradually leads her to a room in the second floor of Meadowlake, the retirement home. From the *incipit*, Sarah Polley resorts to the flashback. Flashbacks allow the resurgence of what Gilles Deleuze defines as "*images affection*," the most striking one being a close-up on Fiona's face as a young girl, to which the film maker adds the artefact of the slow motion of her lips uttering inaudible words. To Deleuze, a close-up equates the face. "There is no such thing as a close-up on a face: the face is, per se, a close-up," and more particularly in *Away from Her*, the screen is filled with "an intensive close-up, enlivened by micro movements of expression" (Deleuze 126). This recorded image within the film, an image artificially made to look like an old celluloid, the focal point where the camera comes to a standstill after a pan skimming the surface of lake Ontario, is literally screened by Grant's memory. Owing to the sweeping camera movement equating the movement of the eye, Fiona's smiling face and the vast surface of the lake are united in one take and coalesce as equally still and alive. "The spark of life" (Munro 275), the expression that appears in the first page of the short story and recurs throughout the film, is precisely what the cinema can add to the still pictures memories are made of. The quest for the "spark of life" may have triggered the whole process of adaptation.

3 In the sequence where Fiona is about to cross the threshold of their house just before checking into Meadowlake, the handling of the camera proxemis is pregnant with meaning, since the sequence begins with a close shot of Fiona looking at herself in the mirror, followed by a shot-reverse shot series in which she is filmed from a distance, into a medium shot, with the door in the background. The sentence "How do I look?" gives birth to a close-up on Fiona and the next question is "How does that look?" as if to call attention to her own face as an image to be read. Off-screen, Grant's voice operates as a kind of voice-over commenting on this "*image affection*", using Alice Munro's precise choice of adjectives: "direct and vague, sweet and ironic." Thereby, through specifically cinematic codes, the film maker provides a sort of definition of her intent as an adaptor. She means to "come a little bit closer " as Neil Young's lyrics suggest, to focus (literally) on Grant's point of view, and to translate the writer's words into images. The way in which the text is superimposed on the picture seems to stress the very limits of the translatability onto the screen of description through the written word.

4 In the writing of the script, Sarah Polley has chosen to focus on the issue of the loss of memory. "When did we last wash that jumper?" The very first words uttered in the film dialogue are a banal question, supposedly an everyday life, ordinary, joke shared by Fiona and Grant over dinner. But the question sets the tone and sounds darkly ironic. The film, unlike the literary text, unambiguously names Fiona's illness: Alzheimer's disease. Critical critics might be tempted to pass judgement on the pace of the film, and to say that it makes a short story long. But although it may seem to be a slow motion picture, it is one that could arguably be defined as a picture about slow motion, that of the implacable "progress" up to "the end of things." Fiona's phrasing in the car driving towards Meadowlake after Christmas stresses the process that is at work; it clearly denies the stillness of the indicative: "I'm not gone", and emphasizes the continuous

form: "I'm going." Most of the stylistic devices the film-maker resorts to are aimed at rendering a slow process of fading away.

5 Slow motion away from Fiona is precisely what the film opens with. It sets the narrative in motion within a specific signifying system. The opening shot, viewed from the inside of Grant's car provides an interesting visual rendering of Alice Munro's textual editing and her organization of the textual space. In terms of narrative construction, as a reader of the literary text, the film maker may have been sensitive to the striking handling of time in Alice Munro's writing, with a constant shift from one tense to another, where one can see the equivalent on the page of the cinematic cut. The editing of the film aims at rendering the fragmentation of the timeline at work in the short story whose discontinuities, ruptures, abrupt cuts tend to disorient the reader. The disrupted and disruptive chronology may have been read as an invitation to film making. The successive paragraphs operate like a travelling forward whereby the narrative gradually ventures into Marian's residential district, up to the house in front of which Grant's car stops: a scene inserted within two passages devoted to Fiona's dismay and severe depression in Meadowlake after Aubrey has left. "In the parking lot a woman wearing a tartan pants suit was getting a folded up wheelchair out of the trunk of her car" (Munro 305). This sentence is interestingly followed by a blank space in the text of the short story; then come the various stages of Grant's progress, each new stage initiating a new paragraph: "The street he was driving down was called Black Hawk Lane" followed by "The houses looked to have been built around the same time" the next step in the progress, the next paragraph opens with the description on which the narrative stops: "The house that was listed in the phone book as belonging to Aubrey and his wife was one of these". It seems that in the filmic version, with the slow motion of the car inside which the camera focuses on Grant, the adaptation makes the most of the motion made possible by film making, and successfully follows the tracks of Munro's text.

Continuity asserted through cuts and dissolves

> He could hear the sound of television.
> Aubrey, the answer to Fiona's prayers sat a few feet away, watching something that sounded like a ball game. His wife looked at him. She said, "you okay?" and partly closed the door.
> "You might as well have a cup of coffee" she said to Grant.
> He said "thank you." (310)

6 The four characters closely woven together in the intricate syntactic web of the passage in the last part of the short story, with two characters facing each other across a kitchen table, and two "third persons," passively talked about, form the core of the short story in Sarah Polley's reading. This web is cinematized in the adaptation as the core sequence but it is dismembered, turned into various micro sequences leading to Grant's final sacrifice. Yet beyond the apparent dislocation of the narrative components, continuity prevails in the construction of the filmic narrative through both intersequential and intrasequential editing. In terms of punctuation, the stylistic strategies aim at creating a pattern of causal links throughout the film. This is precisely what motivates the montage, which stresses the juxtaposition of images rather than the images themselves. The most striking example of such a conception of editing is the match cut that switches from Marian's bunch of yellow flowers to the bunch of purple

flowers Fiona arranges in a vase, a shot which opens up an episode belonging to a previous layer of time in the filmic narrative: "These are beautiful flowers"/ "I've never seen those purple ones before." To cover the cut, the film maker resorts to a sound bridge: a transitional device frequently used in the film, whereby the sound over a shot comes from the space of a previous shot. With specifically cinematic codes: the cut and the nonsimultaneous diegetic sound, Sarah Polley makes up a bridge between Marian's house and Fiona's house. Grant alludes to Marian's flowers while the viewer is made to see Fiona's flowers, belonging to a preceding season. Bunches of flowers are memories one tries to keep for a while. The word "before" uttered both on-screen and off-screen by Grant brings forth an image of the pre-Meadowlake days in his memory.

7 In the sequence filmed in their car after driving from the neurologist's, Fiona's smiling face is shown in profile, in a close shot, while she is looking at Grant, to the right. Then, following an abrupt cut, but with a sound bridge transition, —"How is your husband doing?" the mental illness being an obvious link here — Marian's face is filmed looking towards the left, with the very same angle and camera distance. The two shots are joined on the basis of their graphic qualities, and the editing is motivated by the association it generates: a two-faced, Janus like feminine figure that embodies Grant's fantasies.

8 At the stage where Fiona mentions Meadowlake, she faces Grant in a two-shot, with a circular table between them. "If we think about it", he says referring to the mental institution, "it would be a rest cure of sorts". Owing to what could be apprehended as phonic ambiguity, a form of paronomastic sliding made possible by the actor's voice, the expression "rest cure", derived from the short story, (p. 279) sounds like the word "rescue". Then follows a cut, and the same type of shot appears on the screen, picturing Grant and Marian, with the very same camera angle and character placement, with Marian's circular kitchen table between them. There again, the cut establishes a connection, bridging the gap Grant is about to "ford" by driving his car from one house to the other.

9 In the last part of the film, Grant is seen dancing with Marian with his head resting on her cheek. Then without any transitional means of punctuation, the diegesis is abruptly brought back to Meadowlake, where Grant visits Fiona who has drifted away from him and who is secluded, utterly lost in her own sorrow. The sequence opens with Fiona's shapeless, horizontal body filling the lower part of the screen. She looks lifeless. The viewer remembers the tale read to Fiona by Grant, in which the words "dance" and "tomb" recurred. Grant intrudes into the field, a silent stranger hardly seen in the background. The shot which follows is a close shot of Fiona's hand painstakingly reaching for a picture pinned up on the wall, a drawing of her face as seen by Aubrey, the portrait of a different person without the "spark of life " that has remained in Grant's memory. The third shot duplicates the opening shot of the sequence, drawing a circular pattern that closes it down. Grant is defeated and leaves the field, as if expelled from the frame, because the distance is too great between him and the alien woman in the drawing. Incidentally, the relation of cut to lighting is worth noting in the following shot, where Grant, walking along the corridor, crosses an unlit area and is momentarily lost in the dark. This sequence exemplifies the way in which through her use of the cinematic cut and compositional parameters, Sarah Polley constructs her visual reading of the short story.

10 In cinema, the dissolve is a conventional means of punctuation: fade out and fade in smoothly succeed each other and it is clearly used throughout the film to connote the slow process of memory at work, as well as to link the various "tenses" of the diegesis. A most significant example is to be found in the incipit of the film: in the series of six shots where Fiona and Grant go country skiing. This series itself is linked by a dissolve to the shot showing Grant literally driving away from Fiona with his car: separate times and spaces are thereby directly connected from the start. The camera travels along the perfect symmetry of parallel tracks on the snow, then a gradual merging of two figures into the surrounding whiteness, then the man going astray and momentarily leaving the woman, then lastly the two figures side by side again. This smoothly edited series of shots dissolving into each other provides the choreography of the couple's life in common, on a filmic scale.

11 Sarah Polley resorts to dissolve as a means of connecting episodes when Alice Munro opts for silence, in the form of a blank in her textual space. For example, when Grant is filmed from behind, leaving Meadowlake after another trying moment spent with Fiona, the sequence then dissolves to an insert shot showing a jug of milk, with Marian's voice off-screen saying, in a soothing, feminine, motherly way while she's pouring the milk: "You're not feeling too well are you?" The choice made in terms of editing and the metonymic audio-visual configuration are motivated by a reading of Marian's place as a refuge, a shelter.

The structuring function of repetition

12 The pattern of deterioration which is the backbone of the scenario delineated by the adaptor is also made perceptible to the viewer through repetition. Various motifs or particular types of shots, when repeated in different parts of the film create visual landmarks and the similarities are systematically used to point out the variations. The use of repetition is definitely one of the most remarkable stylistic characteristics of the film and it plays a powerful structuring role. In the opening sequence for example, the high angle shot showing Grant and Fiona, during what Alice Munro describes as "the five or ten minutes of physical sweetness just after they got into bed" is repeated in the sequence preceding their departure for Meadowlake, with the very same angle, but significantly, Fiona, who is turning her back to Grant, leaves the bed and the space of the frame. As the camera remains fixed, the two-shot loses its balance and the pillow on the right side is left empty, with the memory of the character still perceptible in the hollow shape. In Meadowlake, in a scene the writer does not refer to or even hint at, the same shot appears on the screen, with the same angle, the same fixed camera. When Fiona whispers "go now," the pillow next to her is left empty. Grant goes away from Fiona's frame. Then in the last part of the film, Marian and Grant are filmed in the very same way, in a blatant example of repetition stressing variation. This high-angle shot on the couple in bed is to be read as a sort of inverted mirror image, the most extreme expression of the reversal Grant's sacrifice amounts to. To this extent, Marian's placement on the other side of the bed compared to the shots previously described, is probably not gratuitous.

13 The key symptom of disruption assumes the form of a visible reversal. As Fiona reads aloud from one of her books about Alzheimer's disease, the process which unavoidably occurs is one of complete reversal of the initial order of things. Sarah Polley uses the

repetition of visual motifs to show the puzzling feeling of estrangement from his wife that Grant has to cope with. Again, the handling of the narrative calls upon the viewer's memory. When Grant, calling Fiona "Mrs Anderson" — which sounds to her like the identity of a stranger — offers to drive her back to their house, to paraphrase Fiona's own words "everything reminds" the viewer of the opening sequence and the first part of the film. Everything is repeated but inverted. For example, the wooden shed outside the house where they used to leave their skis. In the opening sequence of the film, the two characters are seen silouhetted against the sunset, shot from the back, looking in silent communion at the vast snow-covered landscape near the wooden shed. In the central part of the film, when Grant finds himself on his own in their cottage, this shot recurs with the same back lighting and he is filmed from behind, gazing at the view. The third occurrence of the shot is a visual echo, whose function is to remind the viewer of the past shot, but it assumes the form of a picture in reverse, expressive of disharmony. Fiona and Grant are filmed face on, so that the fixed camera lingers on Fiona's bewildered eyes and on Grant's baffled look at his wife. It is a reverse shot in the cinematic sense of the term.

14 The long white corridor inside the retirement home is deliberately used as a recurring motif in the film. The progress of the characters along the corridor is the spacialisation of the slow motion towards "the end of things". Although the camera seems to be fixed, a slight, hardly perceptible zoom backwards makes for the sense of remoteness, and gradual loss. The end of the corridor is a dead end. We see it no less than eight times. The fact that Fiona's muscles have become atrophied for instance is materialized through acting codes, with a distinctly deteriorating gait: it is quite simply shown, from a distance: it is cinematized. The depth of field is repeatedly used to show the characters from behind, the camera being the witness of the various stages of the diegesis. The first four shots of the corridor show Grant, a visitor in Meadowlake. In the fourth occurrence of the same type of shot, he is seen face on, walking back from the dining room, with his bunch of flowers, after realizing that Fiona no longer knows who he is. In the sequence which precedes, a striking alternation of twenty shots edited in a shot/reverse shot pattern, systematically isolating each character within one frame, has made it clear. When the corridor is filmed again for the fifth time, it is the focus of a scene where Grant encounters Fiona pushing Aubrey in his wheelchair and where she literally walks away from him. From a structural point of view, this is a turning point, a kind of fold, in the series of eight. The character placement and the movement within the frame, right in the middle of the series of repeated shots, stages the reversal the character is faced with: an extreme form of reversal that will lead him in the last sequence but one to walk along the same corridor pushing Aubrey's chair up to Fiona's door. This time, Sarah Polley resorts to an eloquent travelling backwards. The fact that the image of the corridor should be repeated eight times is perhaps deliberate, if read in connection with Bach's Prelude that becomes the extra-diegetic musical theme at this point. The tempo of the Prelude is divided into recurring series of eight notes, and its conclusion is heard precisely when the travelling shot along the corridor comes to a stop.

Framing and reframing — the seen and the unseen

15 In the film's specific formal system, careful note is to be made of such factors as framing and camera movements. Whether the form is static or dynamic, changes produce meaning. The meaning of the shot lies in what Christian Metz calls, when referring to the framing and its displacements: "the boundary that bars the look, that puts an end to the seen, that inaugurates the tilt into the dark, toward the unseen, the guessed at" (Metz 105). The paradigmatic choices made by the film-maker call attention to what is in the frame, and to what is off-screen, expelled from the field, from the space of the image. The gradual isolation Fiona experiences, her disappearance as a person is followed step by step by the camera. The objective of the camera is, of course, subjective.

16 When Fiona has become a regular resident of Meadowlake, the camera stops for a few seconds on the plate hanging on the wall, on the left side of her door: not quite the "nameplate decorated with bluebirds " Alice Munro mentions in her narrative (287), but decorated in a significantly childish way, with the name "Fiona" on it. In the last part of the film, the camera frames another plate, on the right side of the door, with nothing else than the number of the room on it.

17 Grant's loneliness is also made visible through specific choices in terms of framing. When he leaves Fiona's room after witnessing her state of depression, which leaves her motionless in her bed, he is filmed face on, walking along the white corridor towards the camera, while in the depth of the field, neatly double-framed, the supervisor, Madeleine Montpellier is sitting in her office, "considering the second floor" for Fiona. The double framing of the glass panelled door mirrors her rigid, square presence as a watchful vigil of the place. One remembers the sequence devoted to Grant's first visit to Meadowlake: the supervisor insists on showing him the second floor. To initiate the first shot of this scene, the doors of the elevator open like a shell and operate as a punctuation device, opening onto a white corridor peopled with ghost-like figures in wheelchairs, which provides an ironic comment on Mrs. Montpellier's expression "they end up happy as clams!" In one shot, the film maker encapsulates the reality Grant is turning his back to, driving away from: namely, a place where patients are "inmates" as Alice Munro writes, locked up in themselves.

18 When the camera is fixed, the eye is made to concentrate on the movements of the characters within the frame and on the information conveyed in the various planes of the image. One shot seems to contain a concise visual rendering of the narrative the director has chosen to depict: Grant has left his wife in her room. He is sitting at one end of the sofa in the dining room. Marian, whom he hasn't met yet, emerges from within the frame, sits down at the other end of the sofa. Aubrey is off-screen at the far end of the room. For a while the two characters are close to each other, united in the two-shot and yet away from each other while in the background, right between them, a wheelchair is to be seen.

19 Grant is often a passive witness in Meadowlake, watching his wife from a distance. In a remarkably composed fixed camera shot, staging one of his visits to Meadowlake, in the television room, in front of the sports channel, he is allotted the second plane in the depth of the shot, the foreground being devoted to Fiona and Aubrey. Grant's presence within this frame, having to share the space and to sit away from the two characters is a precise cinematization of Munro's text. "Grant did not mind watching that with them.

He sat down a few chairs away" (294). The character placement mirrors the syntactic placement of "Grant" at one end of the sentence, and "them" at the other end. The word order in the text is the new order of things, a new stage in the narrative, and it is rendered on the screen in terms of framing and composition.

20 Reframing is another recurrent device in Sarah Polley's filming style. In the dinner party sequence, at the point where Fiona's symptoms of a pathological loss of memory become obvious, the camera gradually tightens the scope, from a long shot showing an ordinary dinner party (with, ironically, everybody joking about anecdotes they fail to remember), to a zoom forward which slowly reframes her as she strives to remember what to call the bottle of wine she is holding. The reframing operates here as if to get closer to the silence that isolates her from the rest of the party and prefigures the form of seclusion her mental illness is going to lead her to. As a musical backdrop for the tension brought about by the zoom, an intradiegetic sound is to be heard — the piano phrases of a Prelude by Bach: it is only a prelude.... The focal point being altered within one take, the sense of an evolution is reinforced in the viewer's perception. Fiona is gradually altered, she is "beginning to disappear" and ends up not being the same person: the first conversation Grant has with his wife after a month spent away from her, makes it blatantly clear: "You were not there" Grant says to her, meaning she was not in her room. "Well, I'm here!" People and places are no longer reliable as such. Grant rebels at one point in the film: "We had a good life together. Those were your words. This is not your sweater". It is grammatically plain that the past is to be reasserted and the present, which is juxtaposed with it in an incongruous way, definitely negates the person. The reality brought about by the present tense imposes itself in the negative form: it is a form of negation.

Camera movements and distance

21 There are relatively few large camera movements in the film, but some of them provide clues as to the director's reading of the short story. In the opening part of the sequence when Fiona loses her way in the middle of the wood while skiing on her own, a spectacular crane shot, followed by a circular pan showing her from above with a bird's eye view angle, connotes her being trapped in the blankness of her own mind, the way in which she becomes remote, the way in which people tend to look at her from a distance. She is small and vulnerable like a baby in too large a white cradle.

22 Another sweeping pan is worth quoting in this respect: after a whole month spent away from his wife, Grant phones nurse Kristie in order to inquire about his wife. In a long shot filmed in their bedroom, the initial framing is first on a framed photograph of Fiona on the bedside table, while Grant's voice is heard off-screen; then the camera movement follows the telephone cord and the shot ends on Grant sitting on the bed and speaking about Fiona to the nurse. Fiona has become a third person, talked about, out of reach, a "no person in the dialogue" to paraphrase Emile Benveniste. Grant is "framed" between two absent beings: the memory of his wife frozen on a picture and an Alzeimer patient looked after by nurses in a retirement home. Roland Barthes comments on the significance of a photograph and the effect entailed by its stillness; "the photograph does not necessarily tell us about what is no longer there, but it actually tells us about what has been"[...] "It has been: by shifting this reality into the past, it suggests that it is already dead" (Barthes 129).

23 The sense of loss is also expressed by means of another cinematic code: the use of the focal lens, which produces interesting optical effects and manipulates the viewer's perception of the profilmic elements. A most interesting depth of field shot is the one that closes the sequence devoted to the memory test, at the neurologist's who is going to diagnose Fiona's illness. A sequence that ends with the word "baby "uttered in disgust by Fiona. The whole sequence is evocative of early childhood, with questions that could be asked to a little girl. The last shot is filmed from outside the neurologist's office, so that the opening of the next shot equates the opening of the door, with, in the background, a conspicuous poster representing a foetus inside his mother's womb. Incidentally, at the end of the dinner party, the word she comes up with, when trying to utter the word "wine," happens to be "wain," which is perhaps significant in this respect. The film maker was obviously keen on stressing the process of regression which is an inevitable consequence of the mental illness.

24 The use made of the various planes in the composition of shots is yet another stylistic device designed to connote the effects of the passing of time and the damage caused by oblivion. They are visually perceptible. What is about to be lost and erased, is blurred. The lit up Christmas tree, for instance in the short sequence where Fiona and Grant dance together in their cottage, the day before Fiona's departure, is deliberately blurred: still visible as a symbol, but fading away as a symbol too.

25 During the dinner party, Fiona's voice-over comments on her own experience, on the images she has conjured up, the verb "I wonder" sounds very much like "I wander." She stops in the middle of a vast extent of snow, and behind her, her cottage, the focal point and landmark she was aiming for when skiing with Grant in the opening sequence of the film, is blurred too, like a memory losing its sharpness.

26 The same device is used in the forest where Fiona loses her way while country skiing. The focus is on the bare branches of the trees that surround the character, whereas she is literally lost in the background, as if she was already "going." She can hardly be made out, so that the disappearance is somewhat optical and directly affects the viewer's very perception.

The poetics of space

27 Motion, however slow it may be, is a most cinematic means of exposing what is left behind the characters, bearing the traces of the passing of time. In Sarah Polley's filmic rendering of the literary text, the use made of the landscape is not that of a mere setting. Cross-country skiing is the couple's favorite activity. The parallel tracks on the snow form a motive which will recur from the incipit to the last few shots, assume a metaphorical dimension. The Canadian landscape made of vast extents bearing the marks of previous motion, as well as the surface of the lake, the backcloth of Fiona's young face in the memory close-up are both still and alive. The still waters of lake Ontario do run deep, in the same way as Fiona's mental slumber may be mirrored by the seemingly still surface hiding painful images. The dialectics of motion and stillness pervades the narrative. The name Meadowlake brings these two notions of stillness and motion together.

28 Several sequences are filmed from inside Grant's car, while it is moving. The most remarkable one is the sequence where Grant drives Fiona to Meadowlake where she is

going to become a regular patient. She comments at length on her own memories, some of which even generate flashback images of Grant's young female students. The camera angle throughout the sequence is such that the background of the image is occupied by the road they are leaving behind. Whatever is behind the couple "won't go away": it is kept in mind, kept in sight.

29 When she wanders off on her skis, alone, Fiona looks back and fails to recognize the house where she's come from. Literally so. Fiona's house is the chief element in the topography of the text and in the film as well. It appears in the opening sentence of Alice Monro's short story. "Fiona lived in her parents' house. In the town where she and Grant went to university" (p. 274). Fiona's house is the landmark, the center of a well-balanced, coherent whole. The worst symptom of all is the turning point, the point of complete reversal when she is driven back to the cottage and says she wishes to "go home." When it comes to investigating the metaphorical dimension of the house, Gaston Bachelard's essay, *La Terre et les rêveries du repos*, proves useful. Fiona's native house materializes her inner self, her intimate space. Bachelard describes the dialectics of the immense and of the intimate, and the "reveries " brought to life when watching from inside "the framed reveries." "The onirically complete house constitutes one of the vertical schemes of the human psyche" (Bachelard 104).

30 Fiona's house is her lighthouse. Back from the neurologist's, in the car which has just stopped in front of the house, she asks the most "shocking" question. "When did we move into that cottage, was it last year or the year before?"

31 When Grant's voice over, reading a text which, for once, is not a tale, utters the words "it is like the lighted windows of a big house flipping off one by one", the house where they "[...] lived. Live," appears on the screen and loses its lights one by one. When Grant is left alone after his wife's departure for the retirement home, he is seen in a brief scene in the act of removing the festive Christmas lights that decorated the front of the cottage, as if it couldn't "be dressed up all the time."

32 Feeling threatened by the disease, Fiona says she doesn't want "to chance going out." There is something hostile about the world outside: the negative connotation of the cold, which is plainly associated with oblivion. The bear comes over the mountain after hibernating, after blankness has reigned over the cold winter. That is the order of things, apparently in Meadowlake too, "things get back to normal but it doesn't last" the nurse remarks. The snow puts everything to sleep and makes the world hard to recognize. Fiona's brain can hardly keep the heat inside, like the curled petals of the yellow flowers she studies during one of their walks together.

33 The landscape is mostly a winter landscape, and in this environment, the cold is definitely a disruptive element. In the opening sequence of the film, Fiona puts the frying pan in the freezer. Then, seeing Grant's embarrassed look, she says "I'll go and make the fire", as if to deny the cold reality that is beginning to invade her brain. Later in the film, in the sequence where she wanders outside until it is pitch dark, Grant finds her on the bridge and rescues her in his car. Back home, she is visibly freezing cold even inside her own house. In the following sequence, when she refers to Meadowlake, she turns her back on Grant and she is filmed in a medium shot, looking off the frame at the vast extent of whiteness surrounding the house. Facing this reality, which makes whiteness synonymous with "blankness", she says "You're not making this decision alone, Grant, I've already made up my mind". When she proves incapable of answering the questions asked by the neurologist to test her memory, she gets up and

instinctively puts on her coat: "I was just feeling a little cold, that's all," she says. In the last sequence of the film, when things surprisingly and momentarily get back to normal, the snow has thawed outside and the viewer is made to remember "what yellow means." Interestingly, the end of the filmic image is associated with whiteness too: after the ultimate fade out, after the memory image of Fiona as a young girl has looked away, towards the lake, the screen becomes white again.

The rewritten and the unwritten

34 The way in which Sarah Polley handles the question of memory and answers, by means of specific formal choices, the questions inherent in the process of adaptation, make the viewer sensitive to various points of contact between audio-visual configurations and verbal fiction. It seems however that a possible analogy to define her scenario could be found in the music of the film. The intra-diegetic "Prelude" by Bach is to be heard as part of a scene first, and is rewritten with a slightly different tempo and it is then used as the music of the film, which makes the original both recognizable and altered.

35 In *Away from Her*, there is no explicit exploration of the inner self of the characters, so that the diegesis remains on the surface of the short story in terms of characterization. The film fails to include the dreams in which the past collides with the present and Grant's fantasies form a baffling scenario in his mind, leaving him unable to "separate what was real from what was not," which is a serious sign of amnesia on the part of the film maker. Sarah Polley obliterates what belongs to the realm of dreams, and assumes the form of a revival of past images, as well as the way in which Fiona as a character in Alice Munro's text is part and parcel of Grant's memories, mostly seen through the filter (the screen) of his mind.

36 The opening sequence prefigures the entire movie, but it seems to handle fewer tenses than the literary text, and to simplify the handling of time in the narrative. In the film, the diegesis unfolds with the use of three different tenses: the time when Fiona is in Meadowlake, a recent past, that is the winter when the first symptoms of her illness became perceptible, and on three occasions, a more distant past, in the form of flashback images whereas Alice Munro's narrative threads are far more numerous and the complex chronology of the short story is made of many layers of the past.

37 The adaptation is characterized by the silencing of certain aspects, including some narrative elements such as the dialogue between Fiona and the policeman in the town of Paris, a sequence that has been cut from the film version, as though the adaptor wanted to focus on the two couples at the expense of interaction with other people. Nevertheless the film suffers from what could be diagnosed as overstatement. The sequence which takes place in Meadowlake when Fiona checks in is not actually based on the short story. "Please don't go away from me like this." "It's happening, now, Grant, I'm going." There is no mention in Alice Munro's story of such melodramatic dialogue or of the sorrow experienced by the couple on parting in Meadowlake after forty four years spent together, of their making love for the last time, or of Fiona's tears when Grant leaves the room. The parting gives rise to an excess of pathos whereby the film stages *à l'excès* what the text keeps silent.

38 Overstating becomes quite patent when Marian is filmed next to Grant in a high-angle shot in a bed. In Munro's text, with its extensive use of modals, with the question marks

maintaining a distance, Grant feels the heat of Marian's body in his fantasies only. "He had that to think of" can hardly be considered a verb of action. At that point, the film image crosses the borderline at which the paragraph stops. The word that inevitably comes to mind is the word "obscene," in the etymological sense of the term, that is in front of the scene, as opposed to the back of his mind. Why should blunt, explicit film pictures of a couple in bed and of boxes piled up in a moving truck come to fill the blank offered on the page? It is the very question of the translatability from one language system to another which is at stake here: is it possible to cinematize a text with the guessed-at ambiguities it withholds?

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ABSTRACTS

Away From Her, de Sarah Polley, adaptation de la nouvelle d'Alice Munro « The Bear Came over the Mountain », est sorti sur les écrans canadiens en 2007. La lecture analytique de ce film interroge le récit cinématographique dans sa spécificité et met en évidence les choix stylistiques faits par la réalisatrice pour construire sa diégèse prioritairement autour de la thématique de la perte progressive et irréversible de la mémoire, explicitement due à la maladie d'Alzheimer. L'analyse formelle du film et des mécanismes de l'adaptation souligne en outre que ce parti pris occulte en partie la complexité littéraire de la nouvelle qui tend à se perdre dans le passage de l'écrit à l'écran. Sans être évaluative, cette lecture aboutit au constat d'une distance entre le récit filmique et la poétique singulière d'Alice Munro, comme si l'adaptation était restée « loin d'elle ».

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